

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 30, 2001

TO: Claudia Beach, Tom Bell, Mohandas Bhat, Frank Hawkins, Ruth Neta, Gerry Petersen, Joe Weiss, and Libby White

FROM: Barrett Fountos *BF*

SUBJECT: Trip Report of the Annual Site Visit to Belarus and Ukraine Concerning the Chernobyl Health Effects Studies

The purpose of this trip to Kiev, Ukraine and Gomel and Minsk, Belarus from June 16 through June 29, 2001 was to discuss the progress of the Ukraine cataract and the Belarus and Ukraine thyroid studies. The Ukraine leukemia study was not on this year's agenda. This memo summarizes the highlights of the meetings.

Summary of Findings:

Since the last site visit 12 months ago, the thyroid studies have made remarkable progress. Both countries completed the first round of screening and began the second round in March and April, 2001. Although the Belarussians started their thyroid study one year earlier than the Ukrainians, progress in cohort recruitment and screening in the Belarus thyroid study had been impeded by the inability to offer financial incentives to study participants. This is because financial incentives to study participants are illegal in Belarus, but not in Ukraine. Through the International Red Cross, small gifts, such as vitamins and food items, were offered in lieu of \$5 .00 per participant. Furthermore, the lack of office and equipment and reagents that plagued the Belarus thyroid study have been corrected. Therefore, improved infrastructure in conjunction with incentives from the Red Cross have helped the study's progress.

In Belarus, as of February 28, 2001, 11,834 subjects were recruited and screened for the first time. Of these, 64 had a history of thyroid surgery prior to their initial screening examination, 49 had thyroid cancers, and 15 had benign thyroid neoplasms. In Ukraine, as of December 15, 2000, 13,251 subjects were recruited and screened for the first time. Of these, 7 had a history of thyroid surgery prior to their initial screening examination, 27 had thyroid cancers, and 9 had benign thyroid neoplasms.

Mobile screening units established in 2000. In Belarus, 50% were screening at the fixed center in Minsk, 10% at the fixed center in Gomel (created in 2000), and 36% by mobile teams. In Ukraine, 75% were examined by mobile teams.

Once again, the Columbia University team headed by Dr. Howe was very impressive. This multidisciplinary team is integrated well with the NCI, Belarussian, and Ukrainian staffs. The Columbia team's participation and leadership inspires confidence in the successful conclusion of

the studies. Similarly to last year, the team made a series of recommendations, which, if heeded, should continue to expedite the conduct of the studies.

The ophthalmology and epidemiology components of the cataract study are progressing on schedule. Each of the 12,000 study subjects has had one eye examination. As of March 31, 2001, 9,000 have had their second examinations. For the nested case-control study, 1,350 cases and an equal number of controls have been identified. This represents an increase of 150 cases of posterior subcapsular cataracts identified since September 30, 2000.

For the dosimetry component of the cataract study, the dosimetrists intend to validate the newly proposed method of analytical dose reconstruction, called RADRUE, which may be applied to define dose estimates in both the cataract and leukemia studies. Furthermore, the dosimetrists have prepared a questionnaire requesting additional information of exposure histories during clean up operations at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. They intended to mail the questionnaire in July. In light of the December 31, 2001 deadline for completion of the study, I expressed my concern for the amount of work facing the dosimetrists in addition to the logistics and analysis needed for the questionnaire. Furthermore, I reiterated that DOE does not intend to renew the grant and emphasized to the investigators that all work must be completed by December 31, 2001.

Recommendation:

I recommend that the thyroid studies continue to be funded in Fiscal Year 2002 and that the cataract study be terminated at the end of this calendar year.